

The Bible as a Social Force



American Bible Society
Bible House, Astor Place
New York

AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

Bible House, Astor Place, New York

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The Bible as a Social Force

Common Sense at a Coal Mine

AT a certain coal mine the operators bewailed their lot. Every Monday brought an output less by ten per cent than that of other days. Worse yet, the output of the Monday after pay-day was twenty per cent less than the normal rate. Money in the men's pockets meant facilities for wilder dissipation in the holiday hours. Perfectly well known to the operators are the causes of this inefficiency. The laborer is to blame. Without foresight he carouses while his money lasts. But the mine owners, pitying themselves, did not once think of kindly talking to these careless, discredited laborers about the way to manly efficiency tested under all possible conditions, and outlined with concrete illustrations in the Bible.

Some young men who were believers in the practical quality of Bible rules of life came along. They were willing to deny themselves for the sake of the ignorant and careless miner. They took time for friendly approach to the sturdy fellow with the idea of making clear to him the lasting value of sober self-control. It was not long before many workmen spent Sundays in a Bible class instead of a barroom. The mine owners hailed this kindly Christian service with delight; with something of a shock, however, for they were churchgoing people, they began to perceive that such kindly ministrations, as well as their

fruit, spring from the injunctions of the Bible as certainly as harvest from seed.

The Social Conscience Found

As if announcing a new discovery, some of our captains of industry have now begun to declare that friendly co-operation is the only solution of difficulties which arise between employer and employee. "Personal intercourse and sympathy," says a recent magazine writer, "is the medium of that subtle something, which, though it has no place in the records of industry, has been the basis of industry's greatest achievements." "That subtle something" is merely the plain Bible rule of regard for the needs, rights, and welfare of others embodied in the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." On the grimy bench of industry, in the directors' council-chamber, in the street, the mart, the cozy home, the best achievement waits upon conscience sensitized by that law.

The Fitness of the Bible to Guide a Life

The Bible is a treasure house of the experiences of men in all varieties of relations with others. Its records of triumph and failure can aid those who suffer through social complications. Yet this unique feature of the Bible is often unrecognized. Peering more deeply into this feature of the Bible one sees the foundation of its teaching on social morality to be that love to God and sense of his love to all men which controls desire and by his help expels the demon selfishness, author of all the anarchies of the race.

The One Key to Social Problems

One course of conduct followed steadfastly brings peace into social relations. This is careful copying of Jesus Christ in devotion, unselfishness, and beneficence. Individuals, families, nations, races, can be and are being united in interest and aim through a common loyalty to Jesus Christ. The brotherhood which the Bible pictures in the life and words of Jesus Christ completes all virtues. That Christian brotherly love is long-suffering in patience; it abolishes envy, self-assertion, and arrogance; it permits no discourtesy; it does not insist upon its rights; it does not take umbrage and brood over the injustice of others; it is glad to see the good, and does not count up the faults of others; in short, it believes in men, it bears, it hopes, it endures, and withal it never fails in times of stress. Sincere care for the needs of others is the key to all social problems. It is so rare as to be the Holy Grail for searchers of the twentieth century. The great mystery of success of the quest is the mystery of hearts purified from self-seeking through the love of Jesus Christ, who gave himself up that men here and now may live as dwellers in the Kingdom of Heaven live. The one guide-book for the searcher is the Bible.

Some Practical Illustrations

The Bible is a social force because it seriously, persuasively, continuously calls upon men to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Jesus Christ. It harmonizes conflicting interests and reconstructs the social organism by cultivating a new sense—a state

of heart that is as sensitive to discords as the ear of a musician, and is content only when in harmony with the great laws of the Kingdom of God. This tendency of the Bible teachings is abundantly illustrated by the experiences of the American Bible Society.

Occupied with increasing the circulation of the Bible, this Society is in contact with men of divers races, of many tongues, of all degrees of social development. The briefest notes from its records show the Bible in action working for good-will and peace among nations by changing the basis of the mutual relations of individuals.

The Result Comes We Know Not How

Wherever the seed of the Kingdom is scattered "the earth beareth fruit of itself." In every land it reaches some who seem to have been prepared beforehand to receive and appreciate the written Word.

In 1912 a fire-worshiper in Persia came to the missionaries in Teheran asking baptism. He had journeyed sixty days for the purpose. He was a truly converted man, Christian in character and in purpose, although he had never heard Christian teaching. All that he knew about Christianity had been gathered from study of a Bible dropped in Persia by the Bible Society, which had somehow fallen into his hands. In a case like this of the Zoroastrian the strange new development certainly has likeness to the growth of a seed in fertile soil. We know not how; but it grows!

A Mohammedan in Bitlis, Turkey, took up

one of our colporteur's Bibles last year, saying: "I love this book. Two years I bought a copy. All our villagers love it and love to hear me read it." Some vague craving in that man's heart was satisfied by the Bible, although we are assured that it is impossible for a Mohammedan ever to accept the teachings of Jesus Christ.

In New Mexico in 1853 Don Ambrosio Gonzalez, a Roman Catholic, received a gift of a Spanish Bible from a missionary at Santa Fé. Reading the book made him what he has been these many years—a teacher of the evangelical faith. He says: "It was the first Bible I had ever seen. When the rest of the family had gone to bed, I read nearly the whole of Genesis. Then I turned to the New Testament and read several chapters of St. John's Gospel. It was a new book. I read until the chickens began to hail the new day. I lay down on a lounge and went to sleep. When I awoke the sun was shining on my face. The Sun of Righteousness was shining brightly in my soul!" Several besides Don Ambrosio received Bibles that day; his eyes only were free from fog and saw the truth.

Some of every race appreciate the Bible because it opens a scheme of life as suited to their deepest needs as if written for them alone.

Obedience to the Bible Means Social Uplift

Never can a man go back to ignorance, even if he does not accept the Bible, after reading its verses which condemn the telling of lies, stealing, defrauding, oppression of the poor,

intemperance, or debauchery. He may refuse to heed his conscience, but the self-evident truth is always there to plague him for falling below the high plane of life revealed by the book. In Minnesota a colporteur of the Bible Society last year went to a home where husband, wife, and older daughter were habitual drunkards. It was a fearful home. He talked with the mother and gave her a Bible. When the father came home the younger daughter showed him the Bible and said she was going to wrap it up and put it away. Strangely enough the father said, "No, the book shall lie on the table and be read." The mother began to read it, and finally changed her whole habit of life so that she is the wonder of the neighborhood. The atmosphere of that home has been made healthful by the influence of the Book.

A Korean opium-eater, broken down, degraded, without mental stamina, was given a Gospel by an agent of the Bible Society and was told that in it is truth which can set men free. A Christian Korean often visited him to help him understand what he read. The result was determination to seek the help of the Lord Jesus Christ. In time the man thus broke the chains of habit and gained a complete renewal of efficiency and strength. The forces of good in the community gained a worthy unit.

A Slovenian in Joliet, Ill., two years ago was a drunken, quarrelsome fellow who had tried to kill his own father, who could talk seven languages and read ten, but knew only "swear words" in English. The gospel injunctions got hold of him and he was genuinely con-

verted. He had been discharged for fighting his fellow-laborers. Now as a peacemaker he is invaluable to his employers. He has taken charge of a Presbyterian mission to Slavic workmen in Joliet. In January there were twelve conversions in that mission. Wherever the Bible reveals Jesus Christ darkness is changed to light; true values in life are made clear.

The Bible Estimate of Man is Contagious

A curious fact of social development is its absence among those who habitually scorn Scripture rules of virtue. Such seem careless of the number of lives they blight or destroy. The buttresses of our benevolent, charitable, and reformatory enterprises are people who rate men and their rights by Bible standards. A man named Ishii of Yokomachi in Japan received a Gospel from a missionary. He read it thoughtfully and was amazed at its teachings. He had to tell his friends about it. Later he read the whole New Testament, and thus became an earnest Christian. He has won a score of others to study the Way, and the men of Yokomachi are begging for someone to teach them more fully. Thus the one Gospel has had fruit in a stronghold of Buddhism where no preacher has ever taught.

A ranchman near Kennedy, Texas, was persuaded by the Bible Society Agent to give Gospels in Spanish to his Mexican farm-hands. One of these laborers, a Roman Catholic, afterward came and got some more Scriptures for his mates. His reading of these Scriptures led to his making it a neighborly duty to teach gospel truth to all whom he met.

The interest thus started spread until three evangelical churches have grown out of that distribution of Spanish Gospels on the Texan ranch.

The contrast is sharp between such eagerness to help one's neighbors and the normal spirit of self-seeking that keeps communities in turmoil.

At Goldfield, Nev., a colporteur of the Bible Society met a man with blackened face and hands, and wearing a leathern apron, who had been an arson fiend and a murderer. This man, who worked in the mines, frankly said, "I ought to be in the penitentiary; that is where I belong." But he bought fifteen dollars' worth of Scriptures from the colporteur. On inquiry it was found that he had made his hut a refuge to any who were "down and out"; and he wished to put God's message, which had changed his whole life, into the hands of every homeless, friendless outcast as a cure for vicious habits. Such a man in a mining camp becomes the nucleus of a social revolution through the unfailing sympathy with which he offers a remedy for bad blood and brutality.

Plain Selfishness Alone Opposes Bible Teachings

The emphasis placed in these illustrations upon the Bible as adapted to men's needs, as inevitably lifting ideals, as establishing fellowship where it was unknown, represents first steps only in a new order of life. Seeing the distance yet to be traversed, men who have not tried them tell us that nevertheless the injunctions of the Bible are both needless and

impracticable. Such rules will not work in a world like ours. So in times past we have heard that it will not work for men to be honest in trade, to be temperate, to be pure in life and thought, to keep cool when exasperated, or to refuse to fight duels. "It will not work" was the devil's suggestion in Eden, and it is his suggestion everywhere to-day. This is a lie. Selfishness is the one thing that "will not work" in matters of social reform. It is rooted in the heart and hides itself in the garments of virtue. It explodes like a dynamite bomb where least expected, blowing to pieces theories of social regeneration which the world has tried to make practicable. The ground is strewn with hopeless wrecks of "communities" and "brotherhoods," by which we all remember social reformers who went to their task without knowledge of the grounds of reform.

Surrender to Jesus Christ the Remedy

The only principle that can advance the community toward the social ideal is surrender, one by one, of its individual members to Jesus Christ. Christianity is acceptance of Christ as Lord and Master. "To as many as received him," says St. John, "to them gave he the right to become the children of God." How? Jesus Christ performs the miracle of recasting the desires and aims of men in such fashion that he rules them in a spirit of selfishness.

A Concrete Illustration

A concrete illustration of the method and quality of this miracle is given by Dr. George Heber Jones in a recent article on the Trans-

formation of Korea. He says: "The Bible is present in Korea in the spirit and life of an ever-increasing number of the Korean people. It is in the hearts of the Christians; they know its message and honor and value it—they determine their own life latitude and longitude by the degree to which they are successful in translating its truths into conduct." People who have advanced to this degree have some at least of the qualities of the children of God. "What is such a spiritual Christian worth to a community? Is not his character a valuable asset of society, his example a power for good, his kindness of heart a benefaction, his zeal for Christ a leaven in the social lump, his whole life an evangel?"

The Social Efficiency of the Bible Tells among all Races

So many virtues spring in our own land from widely disseminated Bible principles that many people blissfully suppose these virtues inborn. Let such complacent people contrast their state with that of their ancestors or of peoples still untouched by the Bible. Half of the population of the world to-day grovel and cringe in the darkness like owls in daylight. In their fellow-men they see none but enemies awaiting opportunity. God they know only as an angry being who gloats over the punishment of sins. In their religion is no ray of light, in their hearts is no hope until they find it in the Bible. ✓

What men owe to the Bible, people who have lived in darkness discover as soon as they open it. Japanese immigrants on the Pacific coast are so convinced that the Bible

has the secret of development that they have organized a "Dendo Dan," or evangelistic society. This society is trying to take the Scriptures furnished by the American Bible Society to every Japanese wayfarer in the Coast states. / Look over to Central Europe. In a Roman Catholic village not far from Prague in Bohemia a colporteur of the Bible Society persuaded a man and his wife to read the Bible. After some time he chanced that way again and called at the cottage where he had left the book. The wife watched her opportunity to speak to the colporteur alone. She said with gladness in her voice, "You have no idea how much better my husband has been since he began to read the Bible." By and by the husband took the colporteur aside and said, "My wife has changed ever so much for the better since she took up Bible reading." Both had seen and heard Jesus Christ in the wonderful Book.

Homage to Followers of the Bible

A missionary in Changchow, China, wrote us a year or more ago, "The people generally feel that Christianity stands for truth, righteousness, liberty, and every kind of legitimate prosperity." From many lands we might bring instances of a sort of homage paid by the common people to one who follows the Bible. For instance, the Rev. F. S. Penzotti, Agent of the American Bible Society, tried in vain to sell Scriptures on a steamer sailing along the Pacific coast of Central America. But as he was about to land at San Jose, Guatemala, a stranger, one of the passengers, said to him: "You are the only one

on board whom I can trust. Please take this money (\$200 in gold) ashore with you, since there is no time for me to go out and back. It is to go to my family at —."

These instances from the experience of the Bible Society relate to individuals in widely separated lands. But it is through changing the ideas of single individuals that the Bible lifts nations in the social scale. From the Bible the poor and the oppressed learn manhood, its potencies, and its birthright of nobility.

The Sociological Changes in Asia

Commerce is a powerful agent of civilization. Through the hope of personal gain it brings friendly intercourse into the place formerly held by hostility to strangers. So far it testifies in favor of the social law of the universe—the law of brotherly love. But when one observes the great fields of missionary effort in Asia, where the Bible has been circulated, and translated into action, and expounded in the pulpit for scores of years in many languages, and when one notes large masses of the despised common people rising to manly participation in national affairs, as in India, or insisting on justice and fraternity, as in Turkey and Persia, or struggling even when submerged in poverty to learn the secret of manhood, as in China, one can recognize natural fruits of Bible influence. Dr. J. S. Dennis' "Christian Missions and Social Progress" offers, to any who will take time to read, enormous detail of the fruits of Bible teaching upon such peoples once sunk in ignorance and superstition. The record justi-

fies our claim that the Bible is the social force which all need.

Weighty Testimony

Chancellor Frelinghuysen, when President of the American Bible Society years ago, described the influence of the Book in our own land. "No department of commerce," he said, "no relation of friendship, no claim of benevolence, but will find in the Bible its law clearly written and forcibly enjoined. Every plea that can arouse conscience and every hope that can cheer and elevate the soul has a record in the Bible; a system of truths, precepts, and duties pure and exalted as the Spirit who gave them, ranging over every department of human life and action, and turning to the inner man, requiring purity, uprightness, and kindness there." Wu Ting-fang, the Chinese statesman, in his book on America shows himself a clear-headed friend of the movement for individual betterment when he said, "The greater the number of good men a nation possesses the greater she becomes." The Rev. W. H. Elvin, who has been teaching the Bible to Chinese students in Japan, shows what is its power when he says, "If I had been working among the students without assurance that the New Testament is the Word of God, what I have seen among the students would be overwhelming proof." Professor von Dobschütz, of Halle, who lectured in 1913 at Harvard, adds his witness to the place of the Bible in civilization. "Making men devout," he says, "it makes them strong and influential in the common effort to promote civilization by remov-

ing everything which is contrary to the welfare of others.'"

Seed Sowing Slow but Necessary

The scattering of the truths of the word among men our Saviour likened to the sowing of seed. It is a slow process. It seems wasteful when we perceive the various mischances which bring to naught the sower's toil. But there is always some good soil which welcomes its portion of seed and gives back, thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold. In every race of men, east, west, north, and south, some are found prepared to receive the Bible and yield its fruits in due season. Everywhere communities are being lifted into unity of aspiration and knit together in one great purpose through the work of Jesus Christ in the souls that adopt Bible rules of devotion to God and fellowship with each other. Everywhere such communities are leavening their environment with knowledge of this wonderful social and spiritual force. Everywhere the Book is a light for to-day upon the path to manhood and peace, and a guide for the unknown to-morrow to the life that cannot end. These truths urge us to cling to this blessed Bible, that we lose not the key to our own national solidarity. The whole spirit of Bible teaching, also, compels us to win for this Book the attention of our brothers who know not its message for them. Whatever we must set aside as beyond our means, increase of the circulation of the Bible, in this land and all other lands, we may not cut out of the list of necessities for which liberal provision *must* be made.